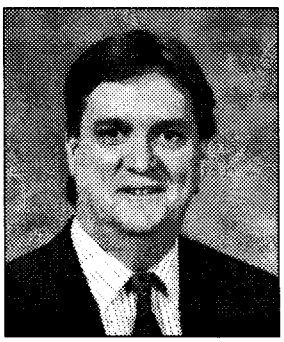
Web navigators will soon make use of icebergs!

By Jim Carroll



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For a long time, I have been running around telling people that over the next few years the Internet is going to become an iceberg.

What do I mean by that? Simply, that we are going to see the arrival of a lot of new software that uses the Internet to obtain some information from somewhere else, or in order to do something special. Over time, it will mean that we will use the World Wide Web less and less, but the Internet more and more.

I am willing to hazard a guess that 10 years from now, we will surf the Web perhaps only 10 per cent of the time. The other 90 per cent? We will be using all kinds of new computer programs that somehow take advantage of the Internet–without us really being aware of it.

Let me explain why–by putting into perspective several different programs that use–somewhat–the iceberg theory of the Internet.

A first good case in point is found with software that actually features a very close link to the World Wide Web. Recently, I have been using Nine Worlds–it is an astronomy program from Palladium Software (**http://www.palladiumnet.com/**). Hosted by Patrick Stewart of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the CD-ROM offers fascinating information about the nine planets throughout our solar system–it is a must for any astronomy buff. What is most interesting about the program, however, is the way it takes advantage of the Internet.

Every page of information you might read on the CD-ROM features a "droid"–click on the droid, and it is added to your "droid list." And here is where it is fun–when you are ready, you click on the "online" button. This launches your Web browser, takes you to the Palladium Web site, and puts up a customized Web page that contains links to Web sites related to your "droid list." Let's say that while you were using Nine Worlds, you decided you wanted more information about Pluto, DesCartes and Apollo 11–so you added those topics to your droid list. Link to the Internet, and you have a list of Web sites directly related to those topics. Fascinating–and a good example of how programs are becoming interlinked with the Internet.

Nine Worlds is but the first step in this new software category, since it uses the Web. But over time, we will be using the Internet more and more without really being aware of it, and without having to surf the Web–the Internet will merely become a technology that allows a computer program to link to another computer program somewhere else in the world. A good example of how the Internet is changing the capabilities of software programs in this regard can be found with computer games.

For example, I have recently been given the opportunity to use the new Monopoly CD-ROM game. It is a wonderful program–great graphics, lots of fun, and certainly entertaining. What does it have to with the Internet? It is simple–you can use it to play a game of Monopoly with up to 15 people around the world. Simply provide the game with the TCP/IP address–that is the unique numerical address that most people have when connected to the Internet–of the person you want to play with, and your game is underway, regardless of where that person might be in the world. Need a partner? Visit the Monopoly Web site (**http://www.monopoly.com**) for a list of people who are ready to play.

Another good example of how the Internet has become an iceberg is found with the mapping program AAA Map 'n' Go by Delorme (**http://www.delorme.com/**). It is a program that will build for you detailed maps for a trip within North America, much like the what you might obtain from the Canadian Automobile Association. It is fascinating to use–if you are travelling from London to Florida, it will help you determine the best route to travel, and will provide you detailed instructions about the highways along the route.

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What is fascinating about this program is that it is linked to the Internet. Once you have plotted your route, you simply select to update your route. At that point, the program will dial your selected Internet provider, and contact a computer at Delorme via the Internet–where it will obtain an up-to-date listing of road closures, construction zones, weather reports and event information for every highway, city and town along your route. Print your highway map, and all of that detail is instantly accessible. Take your laptop with you, and you can look at the updates and get new information along the way!

What has happened here is that the folks who developed the Map 'n' Go program realized they could greatly expand the capabilities of the software, by allowing the program to go out and talk to another computer on the Internet, in order to grab some type of information–in this case, data related to highways and weather.

My final example is Wetsock (**http://vanbc.wimsey.com/~atekant/**), a little utility for Windows 95. Install it, and there it sits on your Windows task bar. Click on it, and you'll see the current temperature and weather report. How does it do this? Once in a while, it uses your link to the Internet to travel to a weather reporting site to get the latest weather details. Unfortunately, even though it has been written by a fellow in Vancouver, it only handles U.S. weather reports and forecasts at this time.

All of these programs are excellent examples of how the Internet is becoming much more than a tool for simple Web browsing–it is becoming the foundation for a new breed of iceberg software, in which a program merely uses the existence of the Internet in order to do something special.

And if you will forgive me, these programs are just the tip of the iceberg of what we will see in the near future. We will have personal financial software that will talk directly to our banks, spreadsheets that link to other spreadsheets around the world in order to grab some data and word processing software that can obtain documents from other Internet servers anywhere in the world.

A gigantic global computer is taking shape in the form of the Internet–and the world of software will never be the same.

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